

March 6, 2012

Kelly-Ann James-Haynes

THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN

RAISED SB 294: AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDREN AND THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Greetings Senator Gerratana, Representative Urbana, and other distinguished committee members; my name is Kelly-Ann James-Haynes a graduate student from the University of Connecticut, School of Social Work. I am here today to testify in support of raised SB 294, which aims to increase contact between children placed in foster homes and the Department of Children and Families (DCF).

I have worked directly with children in foster care, specifically those living in group homes. I found these children to be like most teenagers, loud, having their own sense of fashion and music, or saying they just didn't get enough sleep the night before. In addition to normal teenage concerns, they were dealing with other more serious issues, the most obvious, their families and schools or origin were at least 30 or more minutes away. It wasn't until I spent my first month in Connecticut, away from all of my family and friends that I could truly empathize with the loneliness these children must feel. A few things that we know about children in foster care: they have a history of being abused and or neglected by their caregivers, they've experienced trauma, and many have had multiple placements. Understanding how these experiences have shaped their thinking is beneficial in understanding why they do not readily trust or welcome new adults into their lives. For some of these children, their worker may be one of their strongest advocates, or possibly the only consistent adult in their life.

For some, if not most of these children, a visit from their worker brings up many feelings. This is the person who knows their family, their neighborhood, the school they came from, and possibly if and when they will return home. To insure these children are not exposed to additional harm, it is imperative and makes sense that DCF would visit them at least once every two months. Bi-monthly visits provide follow-up support for all members of the foster family, and aids in creating a healthy and stable environment. Workers can also aid foster families with coping with the challenges of changing dynamics in the family. I encourage you to pass SB 294. These children are amongst the most vulnerable in our community, but with supportive legislations we can help them to become the most resilient.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue and your commitment to the children of Connecticut. I would be happy to answer any questions.